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Divine Providence,

THE

SUPPORT OF GOOD MEN

Under all

EVENTS

A

SERMON

Preached before the

Lord Mayor, &c.

At *Guild-Hall* Chappel, *June* 20*th*. 1680.

By *William Shelton*, Rector of St. *James Colchester*.

LONDON,

Printed for *Nathaniel Ranew* at the *King's Arms*, and *Jonathan Robinson* at the *Golden Lyon*, in St. *Paul's* Church-yard. 1680.

TO THE

Right Honourable,

Sr. ROBERT CLAYTON

Lord Mayor,

And to the

Right Worſhipful the ALDERMEN and SHERIFFS

OF THE

CITY of *LONDON.*

Right Honourable
and
Right Worſhipful,

THE Doctrine of Providence has divers Adverſaries: Not only ſuch as Atheiſtically disbelieve it, but ſuch alſo as perverſly infer from it; ſo

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do they who from present Success argue to the Merits of their Cause, and justifie their Villanies in the Name of God.

If to grate upon former times were a pleasing Argument, or such as might serve any good End, I could have made this a part of my Discourse: But having contented my self to give an hint, that the Providence of God is no Justification of wicked Enterprizes, I chose these Words for another purpose.

Instead of disputing a Controversie (of which these Times are full) I thought it as seasonable to put men in mind of a Truth, which we all acknowledg, but it has not a sufficient Influence upon our Lives. If it be too hard to call them Adversaries to this Doctrine, yet it must be owned that they disparage Providence, that they have low and dishonourable thoughts of God's

God's governing the World, who cannot infer from his *Wiſdom* and *Goodneſs* and *Power*, that it is ſafe and happy to truſt in him.

That which is ſaid to this End in the following Sermon, was by your *Lordſhip* and the *Aldermen* then preſent, received with ſuch candor and good acceptance, that you have thought fit to command it to be made Publick. To which I conſent more as a Teſtimony of my Obedience, than an Inſtance of my Choice. I have not ſo great an Opinion of it, as to think, it deſerves better than many others which are not Printed.

Yet I know it was preach'd with an honeſt Deſign, And I know there is need that men ſhould be awaken'd to a ſenſe of their dependence on God; And if any honeſt man finds himſelf brought to a better temper of mind by reading this

this Sermon; If it give occaſion to any man, to reſolve by the Grace of God to live better, that he may not make God his Enemy; and if it ſhall then encourage him to truſt in God whatever befals him; I will thank God, who put theſe thoughts into my mind, and I will thank your Lordſhip and your Brethren, for being Inſtruments thus to reform any man's life, or to ſatisfie his mind. I am,

Colcheſter, *July* 8th. 1680.

Right Honourable and

Right Worſhipful,

Your moſt Humble and

Faithful Servant,

W. SHELTON.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE, THE SUPPORT OF GOOD MEN UNDER ALL EVENTS.

A Sermon preached before the right Honourable the Lord Major, *&c.* on *June* 20*th*. 1680.

PSALM 97. 1.

The Lord Reigneth, let the Earth Rejoyce.

THey who deny that the Providence of God is concerned in humane Affaires, as they may well be thought to deny the being of

God, becauſe the very notion of a Deity infinite in knowledge and Almighty in Power, ſuppoſes it no difficult task for him to govern the World who firſt made it; ſo do they undermine and deſtroy the principal ſupport of a good mans Confidence. For where ſhall the weary mind of man repoſe it ſelf, amidſt the ſurpriſing Accidents, and afflicting diſappointments of this life? Is the World a Lottery? and do things come to paſs by chance? What a poor content then do our preſent Enjoyments adminiſter to us, and where is our ſecurity for the time to come? *To what purpoſe do I live in a world void of God, and void of* Providence? *But there is a God, and he doth take care of human Affairs.* This was the ſatisfaction of the *Heathen Emperour*; *The Lord Reigns, let the Earth rejoyce.* So here the Divine *Pſalmiſt.* An Inference which a Religious man may at all times make, but he never more needs it than in an unquiet and unſetled ſtate of things. The Doctrine is great, and the Inference is good. *The Lord Reigns, the moſt high rules over all the Kingdoms of men.* Nothing eſcapes his Knowledge. Nothing controles his Power. All things are managed by incomprehenſible Wiſdom, and infinite Goodneſs. And here we

Antonynus.

we ſit down and reſt our ſelves. When we have prayed (as we do in the *Collect* of this day) that God would *keep us under the protection of his good Providence*; with a *Peace that paſſes all underſtanding*, with an inward ſatisfaction of mind and a deep joy, among the manifold changes and hazards of this mortal life, we commit our ſelves, and all our concerns to the governance of God, and give him thanks that he will pleaſe to undertake the care of us.

A Conſideration of ſo great Importance, that I willingly wave all farther preface, and take no notice of the reſt of the *Pſalm*, nor enquire whether theſe words may bear another ſence in reference to Chriſts Kingdom, but apply my ſelf to diſcourſe on this Argument.

It is a great ſatisfaction to a good man, that the Providence of God governs the World. In which I diſtinctly conſider.

1. *The Lord Reigns. The Providence of God governs the World.*

2. *This is a great ſatisfaction to the mind of man.*

3. But, *He must be a good and religious man that may with reason actually rejoyce in this Assurance of Gods Providence.*

In all which I have not the Vanity to pretend that I can crowd into an hours discourse, all that might pertinently be said in this matter. But though out of respect to the time, and your patience, I must of necessity omit many things, that might here have a proper place, yet according to my poor ability, I will endeavour to say nothing that may be Impertinent.

1. *The Lord Reigns.* God guides and governs the World, all the Creatures in it, all the Affairs of it, especially those of mankind. By the right of Creation he has Authority over us, and he exercises that Authority in making Laws for us. To us Christians he has given his *Holy Word*, which is the Law of our Creation, and of our Redemption too. But to all men he has given a *Law written in their Hearts*, a Conscience of good and evil. But because Authority seperate from Power is insignificant; therefore that is also visible, in *rewarding those that diligently seek him*, and punishing the Refractory

Rom. 2.

Heb. 11.

fractory and diſobedient; which Rewards and Puniſhments, if to humane ſenſe they ſometimes ſeem unequally diſtributed; yet is this no ſufficient exception againſt the Doctrine of Providence; as will appear in the ſequel of this Diſcourſe, when I have firſt given a fuller declaration of this thing.

The Providence of God governs the world, and extends it ſelf to all Times, and Places, and Perſons upon the face of the Earth. Interpoſes in all Events, has the Supremacy in all Affairs, ſo that nothing upon any pretence is remote or exempt from his Juriſdiction.

For, 1. *There is nothing ſo high or great as to be above the reach, and out of the power of Almighty God.*

2. *Nothing is ſo mean, and low, and inconſiderable, as to be unworthy the Care of an Univerſal Father.*

3. *Nothing ſo ſecret, intricate, or perplexed; as to puzzle Infinite Wiſdom.*

1. The *King of Kings* Reigns over all: He is King of all the Earth, Emperors, and Kings, and Popes, Powers Civil and Eccleſiaſtical, have

have no Authority but what they derive from God; and if they uſurp any other power, it is at leaſt by his permiſſion. We read of one that
2 Theſſ. 2. *Oppoſes and Exalts himſelf above all that is called God*, whether it be not the ſame who undertakes to diſpenſe with and againſt Divine Laws, let they look to it that are concern'd in the Uſurpation. There have not been many greater than *Nebuchadnezzar*, nor that have arrogated more; but it pleaſed God to humble him, and to teach him to know, and to keep his diſtance: When his Underſtanding (which he had forfeited by his pride) return'd to him, he knew *that*
Dan. 4. *the Moſt High ruled in the Kingdoms of Men.* He acknowledged, that *His Dominion is an everlaſting Dominion, and his Kingdom from Generation to Generation*: That, *All the Inhabitants of the Earth are reputed as nothing, that he does according to his Will in the Army of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, and none may ſtay his hand, or ſay unto him, what doſt thou?*

2. *There is nothing ſo mean, and low, and inconſiderable, as to be unworthy of Gods Care*: He who
St. Math. 10. *numbers the hairs of our heads*, who regards *the falling of a Sparrow*, who owns the *Caterpillar and Locuſts* to be of his *great Army*; who made the
Joel 2. ſmalleſt Creatures, and foreſees the leaſt Events;

vents; why ſhould it be difficult to believe, that all theſe little things are within the guidance, and ſubject to the diſpoſals of Gods Providence. It is ſomewhat ſurpriſing, to find ſo grave an Author as *Plutarch* (who elſewhere endeavours to reconcile the Providence of God, with the ſlow puniſhments of wicked men) ſhould reprove *Plato* and *Anaxagoras*, ὅτι τὸν θεὸν ἐποίησαν ἐπιστρεφόμενον τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων. As if he thought it below the Majeſty of God, to condeſcend to humane affairs. But I am amazed to obſerve ſo learned a man as *Jerome*, who underſtood the Chriſtian Religion ſo well, ſhould think it abſurd, *Ad hoc deducere Dei Majeſtatem, ut ſciat per momenta ſingula quot naſcantur culices quotve moriantur*; the light of Nature did teach ſome Heathens better Divinity: From the exquiſite Curioſities of the Induſtrious Bee, *Virgil* infers,

De ſeri Numin. vindictâ.

De placit. Philoſoph.

Commentar. in Habak. Cap. 1.

——*Deum namque ire per omnes*
Terraſque, tractuſque Maris, Cœlumque profundum.

Georg. lib. 4.

But I offer no other conviction in this thing, than this Obſervation; That great and ſignal Events do many times depend on ſmall matters: *Anacreon* is choak'd with a Grape ſtone, and Pope *Adrian* the *Fourth* with a Fly; *Abſalom*

is

is hang'd in his own hair; ſo ſmall a thing as the want of a Nights ſleep, is a means to preſerve *Mordecai*'s Life, and by conſequence, to ruine *Haman*, and ſave a whole Nation. The over-Officiouſneſs of *Cæſar Borgia*'s Butler, poyſon'd his Father, Pope *Alexander* the *Sixth*, and thereby broke all the deſigns of *Borgia*. In the courſe of Providence, all that concurrs is not alike viſible, nor at firſt conſiderable: Great weights may hang on ſmall wires, we may be ſuperſtitious in obſerving every little Occurrence, as if it were ominous and preſaging; we may alſo be too regardleſs of ſmaller Events; ſure it is they are not altogether neglected of God: Within his wiſe diſpoſal of all things, is comprehended his Governing thoſe Events, which at firſt are as hardly diſcern'd and as little regarded, as the *Cloud about the bigneſs of a mans Hand*; but as that overſpread the whole Heavens, ſo ſometimes are little Accidents the firſt ſteps and advances to greater matters.

Onupher. Vit. Alex. 6.

3. Nothing is ſo ſecret or far removed from ordinary Obſervation, as to preſerve it ſelf from the knowledg and Controul of God: The Empire of the great God extends farther than any power

power of men can; our ſecret thoughts and moſt inward motions of our minds, all theſe are naked and open to the eye of God; and he *in whoſe hand are the hearts of Kings, to turn whitherſoever he will*, is not a Stranger to what is ſecretly agitated in other mens Breaſts. Thought is free we ſay; to humane Cognizance it is ſo, if by our own indiſcretions we do not betray our ſelves; but he that made the heart, and that will call us to account for every ſecret thing, he has a perfect knowledge of, and an undoubted Authority over all that is tranſacted within our own mind. Prov. 21.

Again, The Providence of God extends to ſecret things as well as open, to all thoſe Myſteries of Iniquity that are plotted and contriv'd in Hell and Darkneſs: When we hear of Plots and Conſpiracies, we are ſolicitous leſt their depth ſhould be unfathomable, and therefore leſt the deſtruction they contrive ſhould be unavoidable. But, *There is no darkneſs nor ſhadow of death, where the workers of Iniquity may hide themſelves.* He that caſt the Devils into Hell, confines and rules them there; or if he ſuffer them ſometimes to range the world, and inſpirit men to deſigns deviliſh and helliſh, *i. e.* full of ſubtilty Job 34.

tilty and full of miſchief; yet ſhall they make no farther progreſs than God will give them leave: He can check them when he pleaſes, he can diſcover the deeds of darkneſs, and diſappoint the devices of the Crafty; *He that ſits in the Heavens*, can laugh all the Devils in Hell to ſcorn.

Againſt what has been hitherto ſaid, if any prejudice ariſe, I conceive there is none greater than theſe three.

If the Providence of God govern the world, then

1. *Why does he permit ſin, which he ſo much hates?*

Or, 2. *If he think fit to permit it, why does he not puniſh it?*

And 3. *Why are holy and Religious men ſo unregarded?*

1. Why does a pure and holy God permit ſin, which is ſo infinitely diſpleaſing to him? I might anſwer,

Firſt, If there were no God, there would be

no

no Devil, there could be no Sin: *Sin is a tranſgreſſion of the Law*; if God did not Rule the World, if he have not exerciſed his Authority in giving Laws for the governing mens actions, then, *where no Law is, there is no Tranſgreſſion*; ſo that this Objection overthrows it ſelf. The very being of Sin in the world, ſuppoſes Providence: but I add to that anſwer; God has done ſo much to prevent Sin, and to over-rule it, and will do ſo much in the puniſhing of it, that this can be no reaſonable Objection againſt Providence. St. Joh. 1. 3. Rom. 4.

1. In order to the prevention of Sin, God has declared his pleaſure in Commanding the contrary; he has offered the aſſiſtance of his *Holy Spirit*, that *Sin may not have Dominion over us.* He withholds no help or aid that he is bound to give, but if, in the offering or beſtowing this Aſſiſtance, he think not fit to do violence to the nature of a reaſonable Creature, it ought not to be wondred at. He forbids ſin, and makes known the danger of it, and earneſtly ſollicits men to turn from their evil ways: *Why will ye die, O Houſe of Iſrael?* But if men will abuſe their own liberty, this is enough to vindicate the Providence of God toward thoſe

that remain wicked; he deals with them as with reaſonable Creatures: Men are wanting to themſelves, God is not wanting to them.

2. As God has done much to prevent Sin, ſo does he likewiſe over-rule it. He reſtrains it and makes it ſerve his own Glory; ſo ſucceeded the Envy of *Joſeph's* Brethren, and the malice of the Jews to our *bleſſed Saviour*: And in many other caſes God has brought good out of evil, and thereby declared that his Providence governs the world.

Eſpecially when, 3. It is conſidered, that God will puniſh the ſin he ſo much hates: But this is of it ſelf another Objection.

2. If God govern the world, why does Providence ſeem ſo lame and unconcern'd; when men dare the Juſtice of God and defie Heaven, and grow enormouſly wicked? Yet *The wicked live, become old, and are mighty in power: Their Houſes are ſafe from fear, neither is the Rod of God upon them.* Job 21.

I anſwer as followeth.

1. Who can tell that the Vengeance of God does

does not often overtake wicked men, when to outward appearance they brave & hector, and live as if nothing diſturbed them? There are ſecret throbings of Conſcience, which men ſtrive to preſerve from outward notice, and ſo long as thoſe inward Horrors do not approach very near diſpair, they may be undiſcerned. But *the Heart knows its own bitterneſs*; the mind of man doth ſeverely laſh itſelf. And from hence may it rationally be argued to the conviction of thoſe that quarrel at Providence.

——*Cur tamen hos tu*
Evaſiſſe putes, quos diri conſcia facti
Mens habet attonitos, & ſurdo verbere cædit,
Occultum quatiente animo tortore flagellum.

Juven. Satyr. 13.

Do you think wicked men eſcape the vengeance of God? No; the Viper gnaws and torments within. Dreadful are the Agonies. Bitter is the diſtreſs and anguiſh that men feel in their own minds. Or, if this do not always happen, yet for ought a by-ſtander knows it may happen, and even then, when men outwardly ruffle and ſeem to ſin without fear.

But, 2. is our Eye evil becauſe God is good? What if the long-ſuffering of God wait upon men, that his goodneſs may lead them to Repentance, this muſt not be accounted an Imputation upon Providence?

3. God has it in his power to animadvert when he pleaſes: And therefore no wonder if he delay that execution, which he can haſten at his own pleaſure.

For, 4. Puniſhment ſhall come, and the longer it is deferred, the more dreadful it ſhall at laſt be. Sometimes Providence juſtifies it ſelf, and meets with men in this world; by many ſtrange diſcoveries of Treaſons, and Murders and Robberies, and other licentious practices, God has honoured the Juſtice of his Adminiſtrations, or if he ſometimes delay, Yet

Rom. 2. 5. *The revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God*, at the laſt and great day, will give all men ſatisfaction, that the righteous God is not now an Idle, and unconcern'd ſpectator of the wickedneſs of men: for then *he will reward every man according to his deeds.*

3. There

3 There remains but one thing more to be argued in this matter. Why does a gracious and good God, ſo little regard holy men in the midſt of thoſe tribulations they ſuffer in this World? A common objection, and ſome have boldly expreſſed it. When *Lucan* finds *Pompey*, whom he thought the better man, and to have the juſter cauſe, ruin'd by *Cæſar*, how does he exclaime and blaſpheme?

——*Sunt nobis nulla profectò*
Numina, cum cæco rapiantur ſæcula curſu
Mentimur regnare Jovem. ——

Lucan. Lib, 7.

So Atheiſtical men may talk: but holy men notwithſtanding all they ſuffer in this world, are not diſſatisfied in their Religion. Though God *ſlay them yet they will truſt in him.* And by their *caſting all their care upon him*, it appears they believe *he takes care of them.* If we conſider farther, that no man ſuffers more than he deſerves; that it is *good for men to be afflicted.* If we can believe that the promiſes, which ſuppoſe that holy men may be afflicted, ſhall be fulfilled to them: God *will never leave them nor forſake them.* He *will be a preſent help in trouble*, and will *work all things for good.* And if we

Job. 13. 1 S. Pet. 5. Pſal. 119. Hebr. 13. Pſal. 46. Rom. 5.

can.

can rise up to *St. Pauls* confidence about the happy issue of our present sorrows. That *our light Affliction which is but for a moment, shall work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory*; I say if we can believe these things, then neither is this any sufficient prejudice against Providence. I may conclude then the first part of my undertaking. *The Lord Reigns*; the Providence of God governs the World.

2. Cor. 4.

2 *This is a great satisfaction to the mind of man*; *The Lord Reigns, let the Earth rejoyce*. We meet with enough in this world to make it a vale of Tears. Sometimes we foresee a storm, sometimes we sail in the midst of Rocks, and are just ready to strike upon the Sands. Few are so over-happy, as not to be often ingaged in considerable difficulties: but we may always ride at Anchor; such is our *hope in God, an Anchor sure and stedfast*. Yea we may weather out the Storm, for if we can trust our Pilot he will never fail us. Under all our sorrows and fears, it is an unspeakable satisfaction, to commit our selves to the never failing guidance of the good Providence of God. And of this I say three things.

Hebr. 6.

1. *Those*

1 *Thoſe things of which we are ignorant are known to a wiſe God.*

2 *Thoſe things which are againſt our wills, which we apprehend evil for us, are guided and ordered by the will of a good God.*

3 *Thoſe things which are out of our power, are within the Power of Almighty God.*

1. Our Ignorance is one great cauſe of our ſollicitude and diſſatisfaction: What would ſome men give certainly to foreknow their own fortune. Alas! In many caſes our Ignorance is a great advantage to us.

Prudens, futuri temporis Exitum
Caliginoſâ nocte premit Deus. *Horat. Carm. lib. 3.*

God does wiſely and mercifully conceal ſome things, a foreknowledge of which would add to our ſorrow. But take the caſe as it is, we are utterly uncertain about the time to come: But how will this conſideration calme thoſe troubled thoughts, that upon this account ariſe within us? The wiſe God knows what ſhall befall us, tho' we do'n't.

Great are the anxieties upon the minds of men in the preſent poſture of Affairs. But now try we if this will not relieve us : *What time I am afraid, I will truſt in thee.* Thou, O Lord, art able to take *the wiſe in their own craftineſs. In thee O Lord have I put my truſt, let me never be confounded.* Is not this now an eaſe to our minds ? A wiſe God governs the World , He knows what ſhall come to paſs ; and why : It is not blind chance, but infinite wiſdom that ſuperintends and governs all things. If men go down to Hell God is there. The moſt probable contrivances of deſperate *Ahitophel's*, whoſe Counſel among men is received as the *Oracle of God*, may yet be turned into fooliſhneſs and end in their own confuſion; and in a rage impatient to ſee their Plots miſcarry, they may ſave the labour of publick Juſtice and hang themſelves. The ſubtileſt platform of Policy of the moſt Atheiſtical *Machiavels*, may be as unfortunate as that of his wretched *Duke Valentine*, and may prove abortive from ſome unforeſeen accident, to which they themſelves may yet contribute. The myſterious Intrigues of the moſt villanous *Jeſuits* (or if there be any other name among men, that ſignifies greater Apoſtacy from Faith and Truth, and cloſer

Pſal. 56.
Job. 5.
Pſal. 31.
2. Sam. 17.

cloſer confederacy with Hell,) that were ever hatched in the moſt inward Receſſes of the depth of Darkneſs; theſe all are but like Spiders Webs, thin and tranſparent, and as eaſily ſwept down when Infinite Wiſdom ſhall think fit to make uſe of Almighty Power. This then is our Comfort and our Joy, when they who are too cunning for us, have advantages upon us, he who is wiſer than the wiſeſt takes care of us.

Yea moreover when we are diſappointed in our expectations, this may ſatisfy us. It is with us as it pleaſes the all-wiſe God. Peradventure we are miſtaken in our own buſineſs, and may paſſionately deſire what may be to our loſs. However, ſhall we have leſs Religion than the Heathen? ſhall it be harder for us to reſign our wills and wiſdoms to God?

Permittes ipſis expendere Numinibus quid
Conveniat nobis, rebuſq; ſit utile noſtris: *Juve. 1. Sat. 10.*

It may come to paſs, that our very Errors may be happy for us; as was *St. Auſtin*'s being led out of his way by the error of his Guide, and thereby he was preſerved from *Poſidonius de vitâ Auguſt.*

the fury of the *Circumcellion*'s that way-laid him. Whatever befalls us, God is wiſer than we, he who knows all things, beſt knows what is fit and convenient for us.

2. That which is againſt our wills, which we apprehend evil for us, is guided by the will of a good God, and this is marvelouſly to our ſatisfaction. Now we may *rejoyce in tribulation*, becauſe the hand of a good God is ſtill upon us, and he will work even this for good; the Incomparable *Dr. Hammond*'s word, *Even this for good.* When our affairs ſucceed not according to our expectation, ſhall we quarrel at Providence, and diſquiet our ſelves, and add to our own Afflictions by the fretfulneſs and impatience of our minds? No, ſay we every one to our ſelves, why ſhould I entertain any ſuſpition, that a merciful God who has made ſo many gracious promiſes, which my dear Saviour dyed to confirm, will be wanting to me? No, never let me diſtruſt that God whom I have ſo much reaſon to love. Wiſdom and goodneſs joyn together in the diſpoſe of all that befalls me, therefore *will I rejoyce in the Lord, and joy in the God of my Salvation.*

Life of Dr. Hammond.

Habak. 3.

3. Thoſe

3. Thoſe things that are out of our power, are within the Power of Almighty God: We are troubled upon many accounts, and can't help our ſelves, and becauſe we can't help our ſelves we are troubled; but he that governs us and our affairs, can do all things by the word of his power: When we come into *Jehoſhaphat's* caſe, then are we to behave our ſelves as he did.; *Neither know we what to do, but our Eyes are upon thee: The Lords hand is not ſhortned, that it cannot ſave.* Nothing is too hard for him to do, God Almighty has undertaken our protection; wherefore when we conſider theſe in conjunction, the wiſdom, and goodneſs, and power of God, are ſufficient reaſons for our ſatisfaction and joy. 2 Chron. 20. Iſa. 59.

And if we extend theſe latter Conſiderations as well as the former, beyond our private Concerns, and ſuffer our thoughts to travel the world; we ſhall indeed find that the follies and paſſions and intereſts of men bear great ſway here below, and in a great meaſure turn the world upſide down. Reſtleſs Ambition, inſatiable Envy, greedy Covetouſneſs, and Implacable Revenge, have often diſturb'd the peace

peace and quiet of Mankind ; yet ſure we are, God has not let looſe theſe Furies, and diſcharged them of his ſuper-intendence, nor privileg'd them from his Controul. We ſhall too curiouſly pry into the *Arcana Imperii*, if we will not be ſatisfied, till we can always render a reaſon why things are thus or ſo : The Judgments of God are often unſearchable, and his ways paſt finding out ; but an humble Soul can truſt it ſelf and the whole world with God, can believe that all things are well and wiſely order'd, is ſecure that the all-wiſe God can commit no errors, that a good God cannot be chargeable with any male-adminiſtrations; and that God Almighty does not ſuffer things to run at random, becauſe of any impotency to mend what is amiſs : It would be uncomfortable living in the world, if all things were left to the arbitrement of meer men, who at beſt are too weak to bear ſo great a burthen, and often are ſo corrupt, that *Maximilian*'s Exclamation may ſuit other times as well as his own, when he was Emperor, and *Julius* 2*d*. Pope.

Morn. Hiſtor. Papatus. *Deus Æterne ! niſi tu vigilares quam malè eſſet mundo, quem regimus nos, ego miſer venator & ebrioſus ille & ſceleratus* Julius.

But

But God retains his Supremacy over all the Kingdoms and Nations of the Earth, he does never ſleep nor intermit his care; it ſhall not be intirely as men pleaſe: He that ſtills the raging of the Sea, reſtrains the madneſs of People. A great part of mankind know not of what manner of Spirit they are, and how much miſchief they ſhould do, if they had power to fulfil their own wills. But when it pleaſes God to put an hook into the Noſe of the *Leviathan*, *Rabſhekah*'s ſwelling words ſhall be but impotent Rage. *Haman* ſhall build a Gallows for himſelf, *No weapon form'd againſt God ſhall proſper*; it ſhall not be as man pleaſes, but as it pleaſes God: No man indeed ſhould be unconcern'd, when either Sin or Judgment for Sin rages in the world; but ſtill keep we within our own bounds of Patience, and Faith, and Prayer; endeavour we all to mend our ſelves, and then, whatever happens, reſt it not all on ſecond cauſes. The over-ruling of Gods Providence, is no manner of excuſe for wicked enterpriſes; but if by a faithful diſcharge of our duty, if in Religion to God, in Loyalty to the King, in Peace, and Gentleneſs, and Brotherly Love one to another, we do what in us lies, that the ſtate of things ſhall not grow worſe by any default. Iſa. 54.

default of ours; if others take not the same care, though they ſhall find no extenuation of their faults, nor mitigation of their puniſhment from this Doctrine of Providence; yet we ſhall gain a world of eaſe and ſatisfaction from it: Acts 1. *It is not for us to know Times and Seaſons which the Father has put in his own power*; we would fain hope well, that God will never forſake thoſe that ſeek him: But whatever we may live to ſee or feel,

We commit our ſelves and all our private Intereſts, we commit the Peace and Proſperity of the whole Nation, we commit our King, our Church, our Religion, all that is dear to us to a wiſe and good God: We will ceaſe to govern the world, but commit it to him whoſe right it is; neither the indiſcretions nor the extravagant paſſions of men ſhall over-rule; nor Men nor Devils, but the Providence of God is the Supreme Arbitrator: This is our ſatisfaction, a joy that no man takes from us, *The Lord reigns therefore does the Earth rejoyce.*

May I exerciſe your Patience but a little longer, till I have finiſhed the third part of my Diſcourſe.

He

3. He must be a good man that may, with reason, actually rejoyce upon this account: Gods Providence is not the peculiar inheritance of some few men, but the earth may rejoyce in it, *i. e.* all men every where unless they disable themselves. But if men will live wicked and ungodly lives, there is another Text not far off, that does rather belong to them; *The Lord reigns, let the People tremble*: Every wicked man while he continues such, has reason to fear, rather than to rejoyce in the Providence of God: For let it be considered, Psal. 99. 1.

1. Only he who is in Gods way, may hope for Gods blessing: When men *will walk contrary to God*, why should they hope but that God *will walk contrary to them*: Must he be the darling of Providence, who scorns to submit to God, but in pride and stubbornness contemns his Laws? Who may flatter himself as if he were in a secure Station, who may presume that God is on his side, while he notoriously withdraws himself from obedience to his Commands. He who *waits on the Lord, and keeps his way*, may hope well; but to forsake God, is the way to be forsaken of him. No man may rejoyce in confidence that God will always Levit. 26.

watch over him for good, who by running out of the way of a good life, discharges Providence from taking any farther care of him.

2. Who may rejoyce in Gods Providence, that can make no Title to his Promises? God is holy, and just, and true, what he has promised he will perform; *But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to take my Covenant into thy mouth?* There are Curses in the Holy Scripture as well as Blessings; and for the same reason that Religious and Holy Men hope well, that God will be merciful to them, because he will be true to his word; I say, for the same reason may wicked men tremble: *God is angry with the wicked every day*; and he will be faithful to his Threatnings as well as to his Promises. How then should they tremble who despise the Authority of God, who forfeit all that goodness and kindness by which they live, who are every moment obnoxious to Almighty Power, who enjoy no Accommodations in this life, but only by the long-suffering and patience of God, which how soon it may expire, no man can tell; who if they continue in this sinful state must be miserable, or God must lye, who has told them so? Let these things be well considered, and

Psal. 50.

Psal. 7.

then

then let wicked men ſay, whether that Doctrine of our Religion, which affords ſuch unſpeakable comfort and ſatisfaction to holy and good men, be not otherwiſe very terrible; and ſo much the more, becauſe he who can't take comfort in the Providence of God, has nothing elſe to rejoyce in; for all other things are under the dominion of Providence, and controulable by it. The greatneſs of his Fortune, the multitude of his Riches, the abundance of his Pleaſures, are all in the hand and power of God, who can eaſily curſe the bleſſings of men, ſo that their very lives and all that was pleaſurable in them, ſhall be bitterneſs and a burthen to them.

This is a ſad Argument ſo far as it reflects upon particular perſons, to whom while they continue in their Impieties, the thoughts of God muſt needs be terrible: But if we conſider farther, what influence growing wickedneſs has upon publick Calamities, it will adminiſter more ſad thoughts to us. We have been awakened to a ſenſe of danger from an Enemy reſtleſs and daring, we have prayed many and many a time, that God *would abate their Pride, aſſwage their Malice, and confound their Devices;*

and hitherto God has been merciful to us: But ſhall I be bold to ſay, there is another Plot againſt the King, againſt the Government, and againſt our eſtabliſhed Religion: I ſay, another Plot leſs feared, but not leſs dangerous: Every wicked man is a Traitor to his Prince and Country, and by *his doing wickedly* provokes God *to conſume him and his King*. Every common Drunkard, every bold Swearer, every laſcivious and unclean Perſon, every diſhoneſt Trader, who poſtpones his Religion to Twopence of unjuſt gain; every man that allows himſelf in a wicked courſe of life, is in conſpiracy for the ruin of this Nation.

1 Sam. 12.

The *Church* of *England*, the worthy labours of whoſe eminent Divines, have made the Papiſts weary of diſputing with them; the *Church* of *England*, whoſe regular Reformation is as ſtrong a bulwark againſt the encroachments of *Popery*, as any is this day in *Chriſtendom*; the *Church* of *England* who ſtands her ground, and maintains the very ſame Articles of Religion, that it did above an hundred years ago, and who has not by any *Rubrick*, or *Canon*, or *Conſtitution* ſince thoſe times, corrupted our well-Reformed Religion; yet this once glorious Church ſometimes

ſometimes the Terrour of her Enemies and the Envy of her Neighbours, cannot eſcape the Cenſures of malevolent men: Inſtead of taking the advice that was here lately given, *whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the ſame Rule, let us mind the ſame thing.* Inſtead of uniting as far as we can, ſome there are that take a pleaſure in reporting us to make advances towards *Rome.*

Alas! There is another peece of *Popery*, in which the Nation does indeed advance; I mean in the Licentiouſneſs of our Morals. They by their Doctrines of eaſie Confeſſions, ready Diſpenſations and plenary Indulgences, tempt men to be ſecurely wicked: But how many among us practiſe as if they believed the ſame Doctrine? Were we as reformed in our Lives, as we are in our Eſtabliſhed Doctrines (for there is no reaſon the *Church* of *England* ſhould be reſponſible for all that particular men may raſhly ſay) But I ſay, were our Lives as ſincere and uncorrupt as our Eſtabliſhed Doctrines, we would fear neither *Rome* nor *Hell.* The Providence of God would be a wall of fire round about us: God would defend this City and this Nation, and would ſave it for his Name's ſake: He would hear

hear the Prayer we this day make, and would ſtill *keep us under the Protection of his good Providence.* But if neither Plagues nor Fires: If neither Wars nor Conſpiracies will reform us; though religious and holy men may hope well, that God will never caſt them off, but whatever befall them, the good hand of God ſhall be upon them, and therefore they *rejoyce* becauſe the *Lord Reigns*: Yet all wicked men have as much reaſon to tremble in dread of the diſpleaſure of Almighty God.

What then remains, but that we ſhould *ſearch and try our ways*: What are we, and how do we live? If we endeavour to ſerve and pleaſe God, then will God watch over us for good; and then all the Comforts of this World are not comparable to the ſatisfaction we may take in this, that the Lord our God, who loves us and has a kindneſs for us, that he Reigns in the World. It is a word too big for a Heathen,

Horat. Carm. lib. 3.

Si fractus illabatur Orbis
Impavidum feriunt ruinæ.

Nay, every pious good Chriſtian cannot reach

reach Saint *Paul's* triumphant unconcernedneſs, who ſays, *None of theſe things move me, neither count I my life dear to my ſelf.* Acts 20.

But this our Religion teaches us to aſpire to, and as we grow *ſtrong in the Faith*, we ſhall with the greater Conſtancy of Mind, reſign our wills and our enjoyments, and our deſigns to the wiſe diſpoſals of God, and if we be true to our Religion, we ſhall always rejoyce that we are under his care.

But if our Conſciences reproach us, that we take no heed to walk in the ways of God; then woe be to us, that dare contend with the Almighty. We are then upon our good behaviour in this matter. God will be to us a Friend or an Enemy; we ſhall inherit a Bleſſing or a Curſe, according as we obey or as we contemn God.

Thus I have ſet before you Life and Death, a Bleſſing and a Curſe. *Chuſe you this day whether or no you will ſerve God*; but according as you chuſe, *as you do ſo God will requite you.* Judg. 1.

The Lord Reigns, let the Wicked tremble. The Lord Reigns, let the Righteous rejoyce.

FINIS.

The Reverend Author hath lately Publiſhed a Treatiſe Intituled,

A Diſcourſe of Superſtition, with reſpect to the preſent Times, wherein the Church of *England*, is Vindicated from the Imputation, and the Charge retorted not only on the *Papiſts*, but alſo on men of other Perſwaſions.

Sold by Jonathan Robinſon, *at the* Golden Lion *in St.* Paul's *Church-Yard.*

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